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ABSTRACT

One approach to managing cross-graded classrooms is to reconceptualize the structure of the classroom and the curriculum to take advantage of student variability. In the "Basic" program described in this paper, grades one, two, and three were combined to help alleviate some of the problems of a small rural school in Nevada. The program is based on the Early Learning Center (ELC) demonstration classroom at the University of Nevada, Reno. The goals of the Basic program are to meet the needs of the students and create a community of non-competitive learners. The primary outcome of the program is literacy. Students worked through cyclic levels of mastery, increasing learning levels by returning to similar materials and lessons, but processing information at increasingly more complex cognitive levels. Similar assignments were given to all three grade levels in the class, with differential interpretation of student performance being made by the teacher. Curriculum was related to literature-based reading, process writing, manipulative math, and cooperative learning, with an emphasis on students' experiences. Teachers fostered social environments that emphasized peer help, self responsibility, and expectation of student success in social problem solving. The results of the programs suggest that students maintain a positive attitude toward the learning atmosphere and school and that they suffer no negative academic effects. Students' progress may be questionable, however, after they return to the traditional classroom setting. Appendices include teaching plans, examples of student work, administrative viewpoint, outline of basic school curriculum, and budget considerations. (ALL)

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Implementing Experiential Based Education In a Rural Setting

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Introduction:

Combined or multi-graded classrooms are often seen as a liability by both teachers and administrators. When elementary classes are combined the common response is to teach parallel curriculum, each grade receiving it's own curriculum as if the grade level were in it's own classroom. Under these restrictions the teaching load would increase as the teacher attempts to keep each group of students at it's appropriate place in the curriculum. Similarly, we could speculate that management concerns would increase as juggling dissimilar student groups becomes necessary.

In this paper we attempt to describe an alternative approach to managing cross-graded classrooms that attempts to make a perceived liability an asset. This is the "Basic" program in which three grades are purposely combined to help alleviate some of the problems of a small rural school. However, when combining these classes, the participants reconceptualized the structure of the classroom and the curriculum to take advantage of student variability.

The perspectives of three people are integrated in this attempt to describe the critical attributes of the Basic program. Consequently, there is some overlap and restating of critical ideas.

Background:

SS Elementary is a small rural Nevada school set some distance from the nearest small community and is 60 mile from the nearest large population center. There are currently 175 students with 9 regular classroom teachers. Students represent a broad range of economic backgrounds, however, most tend to be from low income

families representing a generally transient population, with a smaller core of long-term or permanent families.

The "Basic Program" is a primary school program at SS Elementary. This program is "research" based in that the principal and teacher searched for approaches to teaching that were based upon current research and theory related to language arts and mathematics. Further expectations were that the program would be developmental, meet the needs of the students, and would be operational within the confines of their existing structure. Furthermore, they wished to find an operational model that could, to some degree, be emulated.

Such a model was found at the University of Nevada, Reno, Washoe County Public School demonstration classroom located at the University, the Early Learning Center, (ELC). The ELC is combined classroom of first, second, and third graders with a minimum enrollment of 24 students, usually more, with at least eight students in each grade. This class was operationalized by one teacher, a part time teachers aid, and a student teacher for one semester per year. Students were chosen to represent the full range of students a teacher might encounter in normal public school primary classrooms; their abilities ranged from learning disabled, English as a second language, and extremely conceptually deficient to academically talented. The curriculum was purposely designed to be experiential in nature; Literature-based curriculum, Math-Their-Way, Process writing, Cooperative Learning, and a generally hands-on approach to instruction set within a cross-graded, cross-aged, social problem solving milieu are some appropriate descriptors of the environment.

In 1986, Tamara Baren (TB), with the support of her principal Elenor Holden (EH), began to work closely with the teacher of the ELC to begin to change TB's instruction and classroom towards this type of environment. The principal supported TB's efforts in the hopes of solving some of the administrative problems of a rural school.

Teacher's Perspective (Appendix 1)

The primary intended outcome of the "Basic" program is literacy. To accomplish this, students work through cyclic levels of mastery. Cyclic levels mean that increased levels of learning are accomplished by returning to similar materials and lessons but processing at increasingly complex cognitive levels as previously learned knowledge becomes the base for new knowledge. Consequently, similar assignments can be given to all three grade levels in the class with differential interpretation of student performance being made by the teacher based upon developmental principles and the previous performance of each student.

The goals of the basic program are:

1. Meet the needs of the students

   Within this category we endeavor to meet the requirements of the Nevada curriculum, provide learning that has personal meaning for the student, and to set the learning within a meaningful context so that new learning is tied to existing cognitive structures in the student.

2. Create a community of learners

By community we mean an interactive and interdependent environment where students see other students as resources for learning, and depend upon them to be peers in the learning process.

When teaching in this model, certain knowledge and skills are required by teachers. Knowledge of student development is necessary since lessons correspond to the learning level of the child and must be designed to be cognitionally appropriate. Teachers must be willing and able to integrate three levels of instruction into a single classroom environment rather than the more common approach of designing separate curricula for each age group in the class. Finally, the teacher must be willing to foster group interaction from the students in a manner that provides for student success. Unlike much traditional curriculum planning which is linear, planning for this model is like a web in which many elements and levels of knowledge may converge at a single point of learning (See Appendix 1, p. 29).

Perhaps most fundamentally, a teacher in this classroom must understand that what is being taught is a process. Traditional classrooms tend to be product oriented; the focus is on what the student produces, less on how the student processes. Outcomes such as ability to function in a group, ability to be self critical and analyze for self corrective courses of action, and willingness to take responsibility for one's actions are necessary for students to be able to function when not under the direct control of the teacher. The written basic skills curriculum and corresponding

products become somewhat neutral in that they are "grist" for the learning mill, not the mill itself.

Teacher planning must be flexible and long-range. Objectives tend to be in terms of days and weeks rather than by periods within the day. While a teacher in this class can speculate as to what each student will be doing at some future date, it is also understood that many events can impact planning which will modify timelines. Content objectives tend to be mixed with process objectives so that appropriate student interactions are planned while the content of the lesson is being processed.

Principal's Perspective: (Appendix 2)

Some of the problems that had to be solved in this school were:

1. Enrollment

   The number and age distribution of the students did not fit the teaching staff, some method had to be designed to increase flexibility in scheduling students and staff.

2. Enrichment

   Many of the rural students needed enrichment to help counterbalance the somewhat isolated orientation of their families. Also, the economic status and the experiential base of students varied widely, some mechanism to account for the wide variations in student abilities.

The ELC classroom provided a model that seemed to facilitate solution of these problems while, at the same time, being practical within the confines of a small rural school. Scheduling flexibility was gained in the following manner:

With six teachers, there would be 1 traditional first, second and third grade teacher. The other three teachers would have cross-age, cross-graded classes. Any entering student would then have a choice of four teachers, using two very different instructional systems. Similarly, with any group of four or more teachers, three can teach traditional grades 1-3 and at least one teacher can use the cross-graded format. In the SS Basic program, three teachers taught using in traditional grades one, two, and three while TB and one other teacher taught using the combined first through third format.

Students who are deficient in entry basic skills, begin at the level at which they function. There is an expectation within the class that all students will help other students when needed. Consequently, any time a student needs help, any other student who knows the relevant concepts can become a "teacher" and help the needy student. We feel that in this environment, deficient students can consequently get appropriate help faster and can potentially remediate entry level skill deficiencies at a more rapid pace.

Student retention becomes much less a problem. Teachers keep students for three years, assuming start as a first grader, so early retention is less noticeable. Entry level deficiencies that would be cause for retention may be corrected so that by the third grade, when the student would normally be transitioned into the fourth grade and a new teacher, the student may be at grade level and able to progress.

From an administrators perspective, one major change has to occur in perceptions of teacher evaluation. Since students are moving around, talking to each other, and working on various projects and assignments, not under the direct control of the teacher, interpretation of class events can be a problem. Interpretations of concepts such as time-on-task, as often defined within the context of direction instruction, have to be expanded. Traditional views of the quiet student working at a desk would not necessarily be in evidence. Students working as teams, students talking together, or students moving around to talk to other students may be on-task behaviors, so further probing or awareness on the part of the administrator is necessary to determine the actual degree of on-task behavior.

Staffing these classes can also be an issue. Teachers working in these environments must have a tolerance for ambiguity and must learn to be comfortable in environments where some level of noise is expected and less directive teacher behaviors are necessary. They must also be willing to do consistent and on-going planning to see that appropriate materials and lessons are available to the students as progress is made.

Observer's Perspective:

There are three aspects of the Basic program that need to be commented upon: facilitating conditions, outcomes, and research ties. The first, and possibly most important facilitating condition, is administrative support. During the implementation of this project, support went beyond personal

approval at the building level, EH networked with parents, administrators, and other teachers to explain the program and generate extended support for the program. Personally, EH tolerated a high level of ambiguity since day to day operations of the class did not fit the direct instruction model often associated with good teaching, and planning. This leads to the third support issue, an alternative view of classroom dynamics tolerated in the supervisory process. Since classroom dynamics were somewhat less structured than other classes, the supervisory expectations and processes had to reflect the differences.

A second facilitating condition was related to teacher selection. Both the Basic and the ELC the teachers expressed very clear child-centered philosophies that supported their efforts to design experiential learning environments. There was a willingness on the part of the teachers to learn new technologies related to instruction and to continue in the learning process until appropriate teaching mastery was gained. TB expressed the insight that only after three years of learning and trying was she beginning to really become comfortable with her abilities and the Basic class dynamics.

The third facilitating condition was in the area of resources, both emotional and financial. For TB and the other teacher at SS using this model, there was emotional support from the principal, each other, plus ties to the ELC faculty. Financially, there was some need for start-up monies to purchase the books and supplies for the literature-based curriculum

(Appendix 3). However, in both the ELC and the Basic program this cost appeared to be limited to the first year or two, actual base expenditures after-start up could actually be less than traditional classrooms since prepackaged workbooks and other expensive consumable are less necessary.

Certainly in the area of administrator concerns, one outcome was that cross-graded classrooms provided for greater scheduling flexibility. Mixing traditional classrooms with cross-graded classes provided for multiple environments within which to place children.

With some confidence I feel we can say that traditional achievement scores do not appear to suffer in these classes. In the ELC there is some evidence that learning may be accelerated in some students who had been in this type of environment for three years. Data are limited so caution is in order, however, the mechanism for this potential increase could be in the social environment of the class. Since students are expected to seek out other students for problem solving, the number of learning contacts an individual student can have in a unit of time is potentially much greater than in traditional classes. This acceleration of learning contacts may accumulate over time resulting better or faster learning by students, much in the same mode as suggested by the Mastery Learning advocates.

Student attitudes about coming to school and class appear to be good. Comments by students and attendance records would indicate that generally students enjoy coming to school. The noncompetitive atmosphere combined with the orientation towards student success may be contributing factors.

One self-concept inventory was given to the ELC students. Results indicated that the student "Real Self" was congruent with "Ideal Self", or that the students generally liked who they were. The counselor giving the inventory remarked that it was the first time she had gotten these positive results.

Finally, there appear to be generally reduced management problems for the teacher. Videotapes of the first week of the ELC indicate that by the third day of class students are "in the groove" and have generally been enculturated into the expectations of the teacher. The mechanism for this rapid enculturation is suggested in that only the first graders are entirely new to the class. The second and third graders do most of the training of the first graders since most of the classroom expectations are similar from year to year.

Two classroom dynamics seem to contribute towards this rapid enculturation. Because student interaction is fostered by the teacher, students are not penalized when asking for help or clarification from peers; and, since competition is reduced, helping a peer does not penalize one's own grade.

A supportive social dynamic is that of individual responsibility within a social problem solving setting. When individual or small group problems occur they are expressed as

inappropriate choices by the students. Failure to correct a problem results in exclusion from the social aspects of the class with the responsibility placed upon the student to reenter the class when they feel they can behave appropriately. Should there be larger problems involving the class as a whole, group problem solving sessions are held, facilitated by the teacher but processed by the students.

There are a number of ties to current research that can be made related to this project. The first in in the realm of effective principal literature. Interviews with EH indicate she has a clear understanding of the student population and is able to clearly articulate a "vision" of what the students need and how the school is able to provide for those needs. She has clearly articulated this vision to the various populations relevant to the education of the children (viz., parents, teachers,and superordinates), and has operationalized this vision by finding personnel able to function as need, provided money and other resources necessary to carry-on with the project, and by providing for staff development appropriate to teacher needs. It is clear that without the motivation provided by EH the Basic program would never have occurred.

A second research referent is the school improvement research. This is a site based improvement model that developed out of the needs of the high risk students. While EH does provide instructional leadership, the teachers are the primary agents of operation and are empowered to make those changes within their classrooms necessary to achieve intended goals.

The most important tie to research is related to the instructional program. Reading is Literature Based rather than basal in it's primary orientation. Writing is Writing Process which attempts to get the students interested in writing by having them write about their lives. Mathematics is congruent with Math-Their-Way and other hands-on types of mathematics programs. Much of the work is cooperative with an emphasis on the total student experience being one of cooperation. The common theme of these curricular elements is that of being experientially based.

The impact of the program on self-concept is unknown. The ELC survey suggests that the impact of cross-graded instruction is not negative. It could be argued that single graded classes emphasis relatively small differences in students then makes those differences unacceptable. Our hypothesis is that because differences among students are obvious, differences become more acceptable thus less likely to be negatives in cross-graded classes.

There are a number of questions about the effects of the Basic program but two are especially important to this effort. The first question is related to synergism. As students progress through the three grades in the cross age format there is the possibility that learning accelerates and students learn better and faster the longer they are in the system. By the third grade some ELC students who tested low in the first grade were at grade level on standardized tests by the third grade. Similarly, students who have good skills in the first grade seem

not to suffer academically. Consequently, this instructional format may have positive implications for students at risk while not negatively impacting more advanced students.

Because the social environment and classroom dynamics are different from traditional classrooms the question of survival in traditional settings is important. Efforts need to be made to follow the students longitudinally into higher grades.

Summary:

The Basic class is a cross-graded, grades one, two, and three, program that attempts to ameliorate some problems of a rural setting. The benefits of a cross-graded class are obtained by implementing curricula that fosters student interaction in a risk-free environment. Curriculum research that forms the bases for the program are related to Literature-Based reading, Process writing, manipulative math and cooperative learning; all curricula that emphasize student experiences. Teacher fostered social environments emphasize peer help, self responsibility, and an expectation of student success within a social problem solving milieu.

Outcomes of the Basic program and the related ELC suggest that students suffer no negative academic effects. Social outcomes suggest that students like the environment, function well in the noncompetitive atmosphere, and generally maintain a positive attitude towards school.

Some data from the ELC suggests that some students may accelerate their learning in this environment. Research on the possibility of some synergistic learning outcomes as a result of

the environment are necessary. Similarly, the impact of being in this social environment on students as the progress to the fourth grade is an important question.

APPENDIX 1

BASIC PROGRAM

by

Tamara Baren

The decision to implement an integrated 1, 2, 3 program at our school solved some administrative problems, as Mrs. Holden shared, and offered to our students an alternative to the traditional classroom environment.

The Basic Program was modeled directly on the work of Diane Barone who was the instructor for the UNR Demonstration Classroom at the Early Learning Center, 1987. Mrs. Baron's approach was unique in that her classroom organization, teaching methods, and curriculum organization reflected many of the most current research findings about children's learning and development. Mrs. Barone's model had these singular features:

1. Reading was taught through the use of language experience activities for early readers, and trade books (children's literature) constituted the reading material for older students. Word study and

comprehension activities were incorporated into reading time.

2. Math activities were based on mastering concrete explorations before tackling tasks on the pictorial and abstract levels.

3. Language arts was approached through the writing process. Students writing daily developed the need for knowledge of specific grammar and punctuation skills and learned them in the context of the writing format.

4. Students were immersed in reading applications in all aspects of their studies.

5. Social studies and science explorations were integrated into all areas of the curriculum.

6. Students were a community of learner-teachers with multiple opportunities for learning contacts throughout the day.

Grouping three levels of children's ages and skills into one framework raised several questions in our minds. We needed to address how we were going to meet state and district curriculum goals for these three grades. We were concerned about meeting the seemingly diverse social needs of a six- to nine-year-old age span. We asked ourselves how to create and

maintain a learning environment where students would practice the skills needed for literacy.

In order to think globally about this prospect, one needs to consider what literacy for young children means. Our acceptance of Mrs. Barone's format meant looking at literacy in a holistic light.

Students who would be considered literate would be daily reading for pleasure, and using books as a resource for information about interesting topics. They would be actively thinking about their world, making comparisons, and otherwise investigating relationships. They would naturally use writing as a method of recording events, communicating with others, and sharing their lives and ideas. They would be developing math concepts, finding applications for arithmetic computation, and understanding the language of problem solving. They would be able to interact productively in the course of their studies.

This is a longer term view of primary education than can be achieved in the context of single level texts and workbooks. Grades 1, 2, and 3 can be considered a primary block.

Instead of three separate grades, the skills we commonly address in sequential and formal lessons can

be viewed as spiral in nature, by creating a need for their application and development into mastery. Skills can be learned situationally and reinforced by constant cross-age modeling. By working with students who can already read, write, and compose younger students see where their own growth lies. In the primary block classroom the curriculum becomes a knowable and comfortable sequence. Students listen ahead when ready, and others re-hear material, consolidating their understanding. The context of their learning becomes predictable and reasonable. Students can see their own successes in the primary block instead of competing to be best with each other and being judged by a teacher.

In the course of the three years of Basic, students cover the skills addressed in the Nevada State curriculum guide. The work of the different grades in reading and math is handled in small group instruction. This format allows students who accelerate to have a comfortable place to learn at their own level of mastery. Likewise students whose development is slower have a viable and honorable place in class and can always act in the capacity of peer-teacher to someone else.

Cooperative learning techniques facilitate our whole group learning in the areas of social studies, science and health. Studies organized around thematic units have in their design appropriate activities for each level of small children's development. The primary block concept develops a community of interactive and interdependent learners-teachers.

Because the children in Basic are constantly using writing in the language arts program, reading, science and social studies, the teacher and parents are faced with the issue of invented spelling.

The term "invented spelling" refers to the practice of permitting students to write words the way they seem. Often it is difficult for educators as well as parents to accept that these spellings reflect the student's current understanding of the structure and patterns of words. The gradual process of internalizing word study and visualizing words written in standard forms follows an orderly developmental process as discussed extensively by Henderson in Teaching Spelling. In the Basic Program concerns about accuracy surface in the editing portion of the writing process. Students eventually gain enough experience with writing and reading the printed word that they

generally standardize themselves by the third year. You can see the progression of spelling evolution in these samples.

1) These papers show journal entries from mid-September by two students at very different levels of word concept.

2) This sample of first-grade writing was taken late April, early May.

3) This is a second grader's piece by mid-year.

4) This rumination about an author's work was written by a third grader in May as a reading response.

Obviously the teacher of such a program has much to bear in mind while designing lessons and organizing orderly development of skills. The overall progress for each grade must be mentally mapped to insure steady growth. A clear picture of children's development and their need for experiential and concrete learning opportunities is crucial. Extensive language experience for younger students builds a foundation of later coherent individual expression in oral and written forms and must be given adequate place in class activities. Meaningful science and social studies concepts have to be integrated into whole class work.

One way to resolve the last two concerns mentioned is to use a thematic unit, such as study of plants, the skeleton, the ocean, the family, etc. These units of study are focused in literature. Trade books form the core of how we make these concepts real and interesting and achieve our goal of creating literate students.

I use a web which is a schematic representation of the unit's goals and possibilities. The web allows the teacher to think of as many curriculum applications for the available literature as possible. This sample web, developed on the topic of night, begins with a list of literature. The books are the take-off point for almost all activities.

This sample web, (#5), Night, was used in October of 1988. Not included are the graphing and math applications that could readily be used. On the web are ideas that can be associated with the list of literature. The advantage of the web in the Basic context is that it allows the teacher a framework to develop units that are versatile and flexible.

Another way to look at linking literature to activities is to annotate each book, as you can see in item #6.

This unit might begin with a lesson focusing on Day and Night. As a class activity we would generate a comparison chart of characteristics of daytime and nighttime and then read the book What is Day/What is Night? This would be followed up with a demonstration with a globe and light to model the earth's rotation. Then students in cross-age grouping would generate lists of day/night activities with one acting as a scribe and both talking in pairs. These pairs then share with other team members and then with the whole class. We would read Owl's Day and discuss nocturnal animals versus diurnal animals behaviors. Later lessons would follow with animal identification and animal classifications, and then, research of animal behaviors. Cross-age pairs work toward producing a class book or play.

Using literature as a base for learning, models important literacy concepts and provides the teacher with the tools to integrate many levels of learning that might prove very difficult otherwise.

In sum we see very positive results in our students' behaviors. The children in Basic are eager to write and to share their stories and books. They actively seek out reading experience and turn to books

to answer questions and ideas raised in class. They are comfortable with their work and proud of their accomplishments. They can verbalize their feelings about their learning. They are active learners who support each other in our mutual endeavors. Their learning environment is much less teacher centered. They are committed to the process of learning.

We feel this program supports an active versus passive role of each student, promotes student ownership of learning and provides for application of skills in a meaningful context. This program stresses process learning as differentiated from a traditional skill-specific, product classroom. It allows sufficient time to develop readiness for different levels of mastery without loss of self-esteem.

Author Nancy Larrick, in her article, "Illiteracy Starts Too Soon," suggests that we use real literature to teach reading, saying "This is reading matter to sharpen the intellect, stir the soul, and to win the compassion and commitment of the reader."

We believe that school too should offer this to students. The integrated primary is an attempt in that direction.

Tony

1 st grade/early cow

October 3rd

1

I P L A V V B J

I L C T W P

L T A G W W e N S

C L V W B T

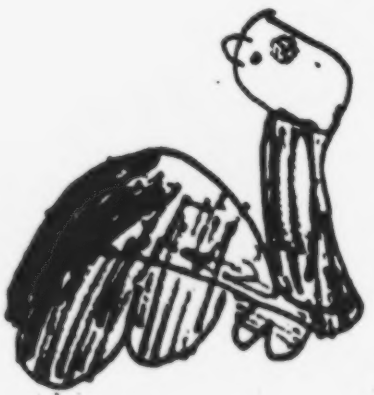
Molly 4-29-87
1st grade

2

I'M GOWING To
Have HoT LUNCh
To Day The eNd

Kinsie 23 jf-97
end of first grade

BRONTOSAURUS



This Dinosaur
Was a giant But tis
Mouth Was tiny. it ate
Plants. it ate. and ate and
ate to fillup it's big
boody It's name is.
Brontosaurus.
it sise is big.

2nd grade

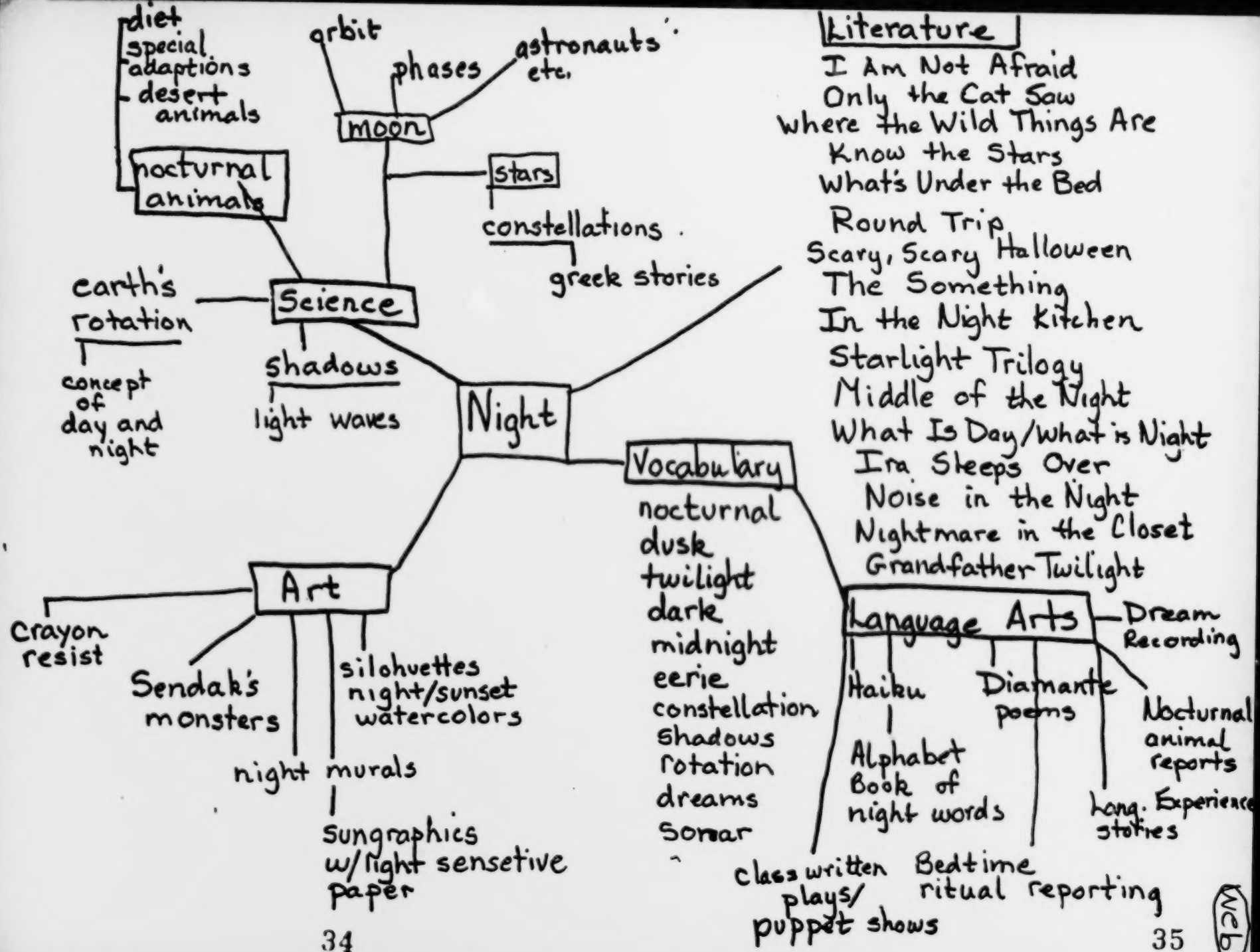
My Alien

DeWayne

Hi! My name is Allyicke. I was born in 1978, on Venus and I still live on Venus. Venus is a lovely place. I am a captain and I sail on the gases. I am very friendly and I like to play with kids. Sometimes I go to Mercury school and at Mercury school I don't get to hot because I am made of medel. Mercury school is like pre-school and

3rd Grade

I think to be a Author. You need mit
5-15-19
tallent. You need a lot of patience. You
need a good imagination. thats
what I think you need. And
I forgot somethings. If you
are writing a long book you
write it least 2 days. Ometing
you need to do is write. You
need to write all the time


Night
Science
diet
special adaptions
- desert animals
nocturnal animals
moon
orbit
phases
astronauts etc.
stars
constellations
greek stories
earth's rotation
concept of day and night
shadows
light waves
Art
Crayon resist
Sendak's monsters
night murals
silohuettes night/sunset watercolors
sungraphics w/light sensetive paper
Vocabulary
nocturnal
dusk
twilight
dark
midnight
eerie
constellation
shadows
rotation
dreams
sonar
Literature
I Am Not Afraid
Only the Cat Saw
Where the Wild Things Are
Know the Stars
What's Under the Bed
Round Trip
Scary, Scary Halloween
The Something
In the Night Kitchen
Starlight Trilogy
Middle of the Night
What Is Day/What is Night
Ira Sleeps Over
Noise in the Night
Nightmare in the Closet
Grandfather Twilight
Language Arts
Dream Recording
Haiku
Alphabet Book of night words
Diamante poems
Nocturnal animal reports
Long. Experience stories
Class written plays/ puppet shows
Bedtime ritual reporting

web

EXAMPLES OF BOOKS AND COORDINATED ACTIVITIES

Only the Cat Saw
Rewrite as a play
Study nocturnal animals: reports, enacting
Make puppets of nocturnal animals

Ira Sleeps Over
DATA and responses
Interview parents about night fears
Sleeping aids, nightly rituals
Letters to Teddy
Graphing who sleeps with what

Owl's Day
Read Day and Night by Weekly Reader
Science experiment to show rotation of earth around sun
Moon study, phases of moon

What is Day? What is Night?
Demonstration of earth rotation around sun
Pattern writing: Day is/ Day is not; Night is/ Night is not
Diamante poems
Study phases of moon

Why the Sun and the Moon Live in the Sky
DLTA
Oral tradition of storytelling HOW
Turn book into play: dialogue [illegible] act, scene, etc.

When the Dark Comes Dancing
Memorization of poems
Poetry modeling
Write images of the night
Night books/poems individual or class

Creatures of the Night (Read with Owl's Day)
Identify nocturnal animals and discuss their habits
Research night animals, write reports
Write in first person about animals
Make puppets; write & produce show with dialogue

APPENDIX 2

EDUCATION IN RURAL PRIMARY SETTING

Administrator's Point of View

by

Eleanor Holden

Our primary program is based on the premise that Primary Education is the foundation which supports all subsequent learning and the belief that the child who experiences daily successes and acquires self-confidence in the beginning years will continue learning with enjoyment throughout his/her lifetime.

In a rural school where the environment does not warrant more than one class per grade level, the alternatives to the traditional classroom are very limited. Yet it is most apparent that this traditional setting is not meeting the needs of all the children whose environmental, developmental, and maturational backgrounds are extremely diverse. Barbara Bowman, Director of Graduate Studies at Erikson Institute, says, "The notion that we can handle children from age five to adolescence in one setting and meet the needs of all children is developmental hogwash."

The enrollment at our school is usually about 175 students, grades kindergarten through fifth grade, and is not always well distributed among the grades. Our Primary classes had grown to 28 to 30 per level--not enough to create another section of each level, yet too many for a single class to meet all needs. This situation made the creation of a cross-grade level class administratively feasible and gave us the opportunity to apply the research being done at the College of Education, University of Nevada, Reno, in their demonstration class.

In our school we established a class we call our Basic Program which integrates grades one, two, and three. The first year (1986-87) we assigned an equal number of children at each grade level and set up criteria designed to guarantee parent involvement and stability in membership--conditions not usually the norm in traditional classes. In the 1987-88 school year we created a second section of this Basic Program still maintaining fairly equal numbers of children at each level in each section but we no longer mandated parent involvement. Each section operated as an integrated multi-level class. Now in the third year of operation we again have just one section of the Basic

Program and are still experiencing some exciting successes with individual children who we think would have floundered in the traditional classroom.

How Does the Basic Classroom Differ from the Traditional?

The focus in the Basic Program is on language. An article, "The Early Years and the Nation's Future," by Ernest L. Boyer, President of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Learning, states many thoughts on organizing a Basic Program.

> Basic School would focus on the centrality of language. Language is imprinted in the genes and by the time the child marches off to school he or she is already linguistically empowered with a vocabulary of several thousand words.
>
> Any child who can speak and listen, I believe, can be taught to read and write. . . . . Rigid grade levels should be blurred. It's foolish for teachers to fret over the curious question of whether to "fail" a student in grade one or two.
>
> What is important is not the age but the linguistic progress of each child.

It is a beehive of activity. There's continuous interaction between students that provide each child with multitudes of opportunities to air (test) ideas without fear of being "wrong." In a traditional classroom the child usually gets one or two opportunities to talk in each lesson . . . answers/comments are heard by the entire class. In Basic a small group of children is working together and each is free to express ideas in a non-threatening environment.

Bonding. The bonding that must take place early each school year takes much time and effort on the part of teacher, student, and parent. In the Basic class the teacher has the child through first, second, and third grades so it takes less start-up time/energy at the beginning of each year. The carry-over lasts many years and is much stronger than the one year relationship.

The teacher in the Basic class has a different role. The teacher is more a facilitator, mediator and collaborator than the traditional dispenser of knowledge. Basic skills are presented as tools of learning--not as end products. Higher level thinking skills are developed. The teacher must understand and

recognize developmental processes; must understand and use various learning/teaching styles and techniques and be aware that "there is a prime time when learning for any given ability is at its peak" (Cecil Clark, Human Development Specialist). The teacher has to be willing to work long hours in preparation and planning and has to be able to convey information about the program to parents and/or other lay people in terms they understand.

Retention could possibly be eliminated. If the child is going to be in this program for the three primary years it is not necessary to waste time considering repeating a grade level. The child will be developing and learning successfully at the proper maturational level and will master the basic skills when he/she is ready to use them. We believe that each child is performing successfully daily at his/her level of ability. The grade level of work must be evaluated when the child leaves the program or moves to another school; therefore, the teacher maintains awareness of grade/level curriculum and the child's achievement.

Evaluation/Observation in the Basic Class

The administrator must approach the process with an open mind. Clinical lesson design will not be

glaringly apparent **but it is there!** You will see "set," "stated objectives," "demonstration," "practice," "closure" even more frequently than in a traditional classroom; the difference will be in who does what. Many times students are teaching students and in a natural process will use elements of the model lesson. The teacher elicits and promotes this kind of learning activity.

Application in Other Schools

In a one-room multi-level school this is a natural and necessary setting. Program content could be adjusted so that all grade levels are taught the same subject at the same time with expectations/product/ outcome differing by grade and/or ability levels.

The cooperative learning techniques can be readily applied. In small schools that have one class per grade level this Basic Program provides the alternative placement for the little "squares" who don't fit into our "round" holes.

A program like this at primary level could prevent some high school dropouts of the future.

APPENDIX 3

OUTLINE OF BASIC SCHOOL CURRICULUM

1. Non-graded three year classroom where students learn basic Readers and Math skills in flexible grouping.

2. Three basic subject areas
   a. Reading
   b. Language Arts (Including Spelling)
   c. Math

3. Focus on the development of holistic skills and their applications in these basic activities:
   a. Writing daily
   b. Responding to Literature in these forms.
      1) written
      2) evaluative
      3) artistic
      4) oral interpretation
      5) performance
   c. Mathematics understanding through concrete experience.
      1) computational skills
      2) development of classification skills
         patterning and number relationships
         estimating
         graphing
   d. Social Studies and Science taught through activity.
      1) seasonal and historical holiday emphasis
      2) center activities, role playing, and historical recreation at appropriate levels.
      3. science investigations integrated into L.A. arts\ reading and Math with experiments and Aims activities.

BASIC AT SILVER SPRINGS ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

To guarantee children's love of learning and their success in school we are establishing a basic education class that will encompass First, Second and Third grades.

The demonstration class taught by Mrs. Dianne Barone at the University of Nevada, Reno, is the model we are using. That class has proven that this Basic School concept is effective. Professors in the College of Education have offered to work with us, giving advice and guidance as needed.

Ms. Tamara Baren has volunteered to teach this class. Her outline of the curriculum is included in this brief. No additional personnel is required but some staff reassignments will be made.

The criteria for the selection of students to be placed in this class will be:

1. continual attendance at Silver Springs Elementary from September 1987 to June 1988.

2. ability (or potential to learn) to work independently.

3. have parent(s) who will support the program with:
   - -positive attitudes
   - -active participation (volunteer work at school or at home.)

In the Basic Program each grade level will be taught the concepts outlined in the Nevada Elementary Course of Study and the items prescribed in the Lyon County Schools Curriculum Guide over a three year period.

Basic School focuses on process and work is designed to encourage children to internalize and generalize the pieces of basic skills, to practice a literacy that expresses ideas and feelings in a logical manner. The finished writing may not reflect perfect handwriting, spelling, or grammar but will demonstrate the child's own rate of language development.

BUDGET CONSIDERATION

Because of the additional hands-on materials and the innovative literature approach to Language and REading I am requesting an additional $1,500.00 in the .....budget category. As the Basic School concept expands to the other First, Second, and Third grade classes this initial expenditure will not be in addition to the usual expenses but will replace them. Workbooks and dittoed materials are not a major part of this program.

READING PROGRAM
Students are placed at appropriate reading level groups based on story comprehension as well as decoding and vocabulary abilities. The literature area of reading is taught in a fashion not equaled by the skills needs. Skill grouping is flexible and concentrates on recognition of words in reading and work study.

The reading program at the early level focuses on Language Experiences, Activities, shared reading experiences, and choral reading. Students practice reading books at their level, as well as write sentences and stories about the books, write new books following the book's format as a model. Art and oral language activities help develop aspects of children's literature comprehension. The skill group focuses initially on sound symbol associations and recognition and word patterns.

Lessons will generally follow this sequence:

-reread known material to develop fluency and reinforce new skills.
-reread latest book
-write a self-composed sentence or story using the book as a model.
-identify letters, using movable letters.
-cut up a duplicate of the sentence or story, rearrange it, and self correct.
-encounter a new book, teach using prediction, visual interpretation and other strategies.
-attempt to read the new book independently.
(Reading Recovery Approach, 1)

The reading program for the more developed readers will follow much the same format. Daily, students reread and interpret familiar works. New reading is preceded by instructional strategies appropriate to the material and group interests. Students have response activities involving writing and interpreting the material read in a variety of ways. Skills taught are guided by needs as shown through the Spelling Diagnosis Tests, as well as needs indicated in their reading and by curriculum outlined in Nevada State Guides. This literature uses progress from short trade books with predictable or repetitive patterns to broader range of simple story line trade books. Students move to chapter books, such as

those characterized by Lobel and Minarik, then later to short and longer novels with chapters selected from children's literature. Students write often in prereading and postreading activities. Directed Reading-Thinking Activities (DRTAS) are a common format for book discussion as well as Directed Thinking Listening Activities in reading group.

Materials used for the early reading group are Big Books/Stage one books from the Wright Group Distributors. Basal readers for the other reading levels are supplemented by literature read by individuals and the group. Reading is closely tied to Language Arts, in the reenactment of stories, retelling of stories, development of poetry, memorization of poetry, as well as creating reports on interesting subjects encountered through Reading, Science, and Social Studies.

Phonics and work study are regular part of weekly reading lessons. Students use known books to conduct work searches, compile sorts of words, letter patterns and formulate generalizations based on experiences with words.

Recent research literature reveals that all children bring to school with them, an inherent understanding of language, many of it's basic rules and structures, and an ability to express themselves in a variety of ways. Basic program's Language Arts utilizes this understand. Study focuses on the act of writing and speaking. Students write 3 days a week in journals, in directed activities, with partners, and alone in their writing folders. Students work on compositions that are published within the classroom and left available for student reading; and shared orally in Author's chair. Students spend a large block of time hearing and responding to models in literature to increase their own ability to create and communicate through words. Skills are taught in the context of writing as well as in small group, and students learn how to evaluate their own work and to help others through the process of writing. The editing part of the writer's cycle helps students awareness of application of language arts skills in grammar and punctuation (2).

The Language Arts program meets the curriculum needs stated in the Lyon County School guides for First, Second, and Third grades. Students text used is informal and conducted in small grades. Writing is evaluated on the basis of ability and growth, and by student development. Students of all writing abilities are able to bring writing to the publication stage, but for teach ability the expectations will be different. For early writers, for example, a journal page might be a phonetically spelled sentence with a detailed picture. The student would read the sentence and explain the picture. Later work would lead to more sentences connected with painting or other forms of self-expression. All first draft writings with invented spelling is accepted.

More developed writers are involved with publishing selected creative writing pieces, personal narrative, and informational material. These writers focus on editing skills. Students have the opportunity to hear others' work in class and develop confidence in their ability to share in words. Published work illustrated by the author becomes part of the class reading material.

Poetry is a fundamental part of the program. Students hear and memorize poems appropriate to seasons, holidays, and personal experience. Poems occasionally are used as models for students to create their own. Recitation is encouraged to develop memory and appreciation of poetry.

In order to develop organized oral language appropriate to students in grades 1-3, there is a time every day, about 20 minutes long, where students are able to share news, discoveries and insights. Students also review the essential of the calendar and develop any current class graph that is topical.

Penmanship is taught in small groups, for the appropriate level, using the D'Nealian writing system in manuscript and cursive. Students are able to form and use all upper and lower case letters, appropriate to their grade level.

Spelling study follows the standard developmental format (e.g., Houghton Mifflins 1981 edition). Students work in a contract format, sort words by characteristics, and take practice tests (3).

Grammar study becomes more specific for the older students. Exercises from text, as well as some supplemental work with the Stevenson Language program lead students to basic understanding of nouns, verbs, adjectives, and prepositional phrases, subject predicate divisions as well as punctuation rules and practices.

The mathematics program in the Basic classroom has its emphasis on concrete experience and activities that fall into four basic areas to develop mathematical thinking and problem solving:

a. mathematics that is used in the real world utilizing skills such as predicting, estimating, and using money.

b. computation, emphasis on recognition and use of basic number concepts and facts in addition, subtraction and multiplication.

c. mathematics used to draw a comparative picture such as graphing and mapping.

d. mathematics that involve other critical thinking skills such as sorting, classifying, and patterning. The teacher

will use elements of the Math Their Way program to develop understanding and mastery in math. Since this is a primary classroom the emphasis will be on concrete activities, and on using of manipulative in most lessons.

Students meet in group to explore concepts, they practice known skills during seatwork then explore concrete materials in centers. Early students use work from the district's math text. Older students use the text for many assignments while the teacher works with individual groups developing concepts and mastery.

Materials to practice concepts introduced in group are available to students. Students are frequently scheduled for estimating, sorting and graphing activities.

Children are placed in groups depending on their mastery of skills and concepts. All students will learn the basic number facts for addition and subtraction, the relationships of numbers in a number line, identify odd and even numbers, count numbers using patterns of two, five and ten, learn the meaning of place value for two, three, and four digit numbers, identify sequence patterns, recognize and use basic fractions use basic measuring systems (English and Metric) in measuring length and weight, and apply math to problem solving. Time reading is studied at all levels. The value and use of coins is practiced in a variety of real life situations. Students who master these skills will move into multiplication and division facts. Students work on materials appropriate to their developmental level and mastery.

In conjunction with the math, students have lessons from the AIMS program which integrates math and science activities so that students apply skills while developing answering questions in science. This program has activities for K-8.

Regular evaluation includes diagnostic teacher-made tests, chapter or unit tests, and end of year tests found in the district text materials.

Seasonal studies and history have been integrated into the basic curriculum in some of the suggested following ways. Fall might focus on plants, cycles with collecting activities. Columbus Day would relate to book exploration, a world map lesson, readers theatre, and boat building. During November a focus on the Pilgrims and their settlement, Indian life, literature related to their journey, journal keeping, and a real feast. December the holidays will be explored by researching family backgrounds and traditions, learning about foreign Christmas, religious holidays, and cooking. In January we would study the story of Martin Luther King, dinosaurs, fossils, and environment. During February the two Presidents make for interesting acting, joke telling, and developing the idea of time in a historical sense. March, April,

and May allow concentration on health, specific science units as well as more map study and use.

1. Nessel, D. & Jones, M., The Language Experience Approach to Reading. Teachers College Press, N. Y., 1981.

2. Calkins, L., Teaching Spelling. Houghton Mifflin, Boston, 1985.

3. Graves, D., Writing: Teachers & Children at Work. Heinemann Ed. Books, Portsmouth, NH., 1983